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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 MCE-00 USIE-00 ACDA-12 HA-05
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ETRD, BL
SUBJECT: EXPORT LICENSE APPLICATION NUMBER 45175: SUBMACHINE GUNS
FOR BOLIVIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE

REF: STATE 14011

1. I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROLONGED DELAY IN WASHINGTON'S
DECISION ON LICENSING A STRAIGHTFORWARD REQUEST FOR EXPORT OF
WEAPONS NEEDED BY THE BOLIVIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE. CONTINUED DELAY
ON THIS REQUEST WOULD BE THE KIND OF PETTY SLIGHT TO THE BOB
THAT STRENGTHENS THE POSITION OF THE HARD-LINE, ANTI-ELECTION
FORCES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. THE ELEMENTS IN THIS GOVERNMENT
WHICH ARE STEERING BOLIVIA TOWARD CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND GREAT
ER
RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS--IN PART IN THE BEHALF THAT THIS
COURSE WILL ENHANCE BOLIVIA'S SUPPORT FROM ABROAD--NEED
ENCOURAGEMENT FROM US, NOT HAND SLAPS.

2. IF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THE GROUNDS FOR HESITATION, THEN IT
SEEMS TO ME WE HAVE TO BE GUIDED BY THE FACT THAT THE GOB
IN THE LAST FOUR MONTHS HAS TAKEN A SERIES OF MEASURES WHICH
AMOUNT TO ONE OF THE MOST RAPIDLY IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS
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ENVIRONMENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA: THESE MEASURES INCLUDE THE SCHEDUL-
ING OF ELECTIONS, RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, RESUMPTION OF
FULL POLITICAL PARTY AND LABOR UNION ACTIVITY AND AMNESTY FOR
ALL EXILES.

3. I WOULD SEE THE REQUEST, HOWEVER, MORE AS A STRAIGHT-
FORWARD ONE FOR EQUIPMENT NEEDED BY THE CUSTOMS SERVICE TO DEAL

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WITH ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S SERIOUS ECONOMIC AND LAW ENFORCE-
MENT PROBLEMS--ILLEGAL EXPORTS AND IMPORTS. THE WEAPONS
REQUESTED BY THE CUSTOMS SERVICE ARE JUSTIFIABLE IN TERMS OF
THE SERVICE'S MISSION AND OPERATING CONDITIONS. AT PRESENT FEW
OF BOLIVIA'S CUSTOMS OFFICERS, MANY OF WHOM WORK AT REMOTE BORDER
POSTS, ARE EQUIPPED WITH WEAPONS, AND THOSE WHO ARE ARMED
GENERALLY HAVE ONLY A MAUSER RIFLE, MANUFACTURED CIRCA 1928.
THESE OFFICERS REQUIRE MORE EFFECTIVE WEAPONS TO PROTECT THEM-
SELVES AGAINST SMUGGLERS AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS--MANY OF
WHOM ARE WELL ARMED AND RUTHLESS. A USG SURVEY OF JUNE-
OCTOBER 1977, UNDERTAKEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ANTI-
NARCOTICS EFFORT IN BOLIVIA,
RECOMMENDED THAT CUSTOMS OFFICIALS BE TRAINED IN THE USE
OF WEAPONS AND BE ARMED.

4. THE GOB HAS TAKEN ACTION TO PREVENT THE USE OF EXCESSIVE
PHYSICAL FORCE IN ARRESTS OF NARCOTICS SMUGGLING SUSPECTS.
THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF USAID AND TO THE UNITED CUSTOMS
SERVICE, WE HAVE BEGUN TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH BOLIVIAN
CUSTOMS OFFICIALS THAT HAS BROUGHT CONSTRUCTIVE CHANGE TO LOCAL
LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICIES. THE BOLIVIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE HAS NOW
INSTRUCTED ITS OFFICIALS NOT TO FIRE ON FLEEING SUSPECTS UNLESS
THE OFFICIALS' LIVES OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS ARE ENDANGERED. IN
ADDITION, CUSTOMS OFFICIALS WILL NOW BE UNIFORMED RATHER THAN
WORKING IN PLAIN CLOTHES.

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5. I HOPE THAT THIS EXPORT CAN BE LICENSED PROMPTLY SO THAT
THIS MATTER DOES NOT RPT NOT BECOME A DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE
WITH REGARD TO US INTERESTS IN BOLIVIA WITH WHICH IT LOGICALLY
SHOULD HAVE LITTLE TO DO.
BOEKER

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